

II. CLAIMS

1-25. (Cancelled)

26. (Previously presented) Apparatus for processing a mail piece for which postage needs to be dispensed before delivery of the mail piece, comprising:

an interface for obtaining, from the mail piece, selected information appearing on the mailing piece, said information including data identifying an originator of said mail piece; and

a processor responsive to at least the selected information for determining whether to dispense the postage, wherein said processor disallows a dispensation of the postage when said originator is determined to be unauthorized to expend the postage.

27. (Original) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein said interface includes a connector for connecting a scanner to said apparatus.

28. (Original) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein the selected information is represented by a bar-code on said mail piece.

29-30. (Cancelled)

31. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein the originator is an individual.

32. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein the originator is an organization.

33. (Original) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein the selected information includes information representative of an authorization code.

34. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 26 further comprising a receiver for receiving data representative of cost of said delivery.

35. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 34 wherein the processor determines whether to dispense the postage also in response to said data.

36. (Previously presented) Postage indicium dispensing apparatus comprising;

a processor for creating a postage indicium, said postage indicium including a proof of payment, for service by a first party, and transactional data comprising at least information representative of a transaction amount, said first party causing said transaction amount to be paid to a second party in response to at least said transactional data when said first party processes said postage indicium; and

an output for generating said postage indicium.

37. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said transactional data includes information identifying said second party.

38. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said transactional data includes information concerning an originator of said postage indicium.

39. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said transactional data includes an indicator indicative of a method by which the transaction amount is paid to the second party.

40. (Original) The apparatus of claim 39 wherein said method includes an electronic funds transfer.

41. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said transactional data includes a personal identification number (PIN).

42. (Original) The apparatus of claim 41 wherein said PIN is encrypted.

43. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said transactional data includes instructional information, the first

party causing the transaction amount to be paid to the second party in response to the instructional information.

44. (Original) The apparatus of claim 43 wherein said instructional information includes a request for a confirmation by the first party to the second party that the transaction amount has been paid.

45. (Original) The apparatus of claim 43 wherein said instructional information includes information on a date by which the transaction amount is paid to the second party.

46. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said postage indicium includes a digital signature for authenticating at least part of said postage indicium.

47. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said transactional data is encoded in a bar-code.

48. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said postage indicium includes a human readable portion.

49. (Original) The apparatus of claim 48 wherein said human readable portion includes information identifying said second party.

50. (Original) The apparatus of claim 48 wherein said human readable portion includes the transaction amount.

51. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said postage indicium includes a machine readable portion.

52. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said first party is a postal authority.

53. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said first party is a courier other than a postal authority.

54. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein the amount of said payment for service is zero.

55. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said postage indicium is generated onto a tangible medium.

56. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 55 wherein said tangible medium is a label.

57. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said postage indicium is generated onto a mail piece.

58. (Previously presented) Postage indicium processing apparatus comprising:

a processor for processing at least one postage indicium including a proof of payment, for service by a first party, and transactional data comprising at least information representative of a transaction amount; and

an output responsive to at least said transactional data for causing said transaction amount to be paid to a second party when the postage indicium is processed.

59. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said postage indicium appears on a mail piece.

60. (Original) The apparatus of claim 59 wherein said processor causes said mail piece to be delivered according to an address appearing on said mail piece.

61. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said processor includes a scanner for scanning at least part of said postage indicium.

62. (Original) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said transactional data includes information identifying said second party.

63. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said transactional data includes information concerning an originator of said postage indicium.

64. (Original) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said transactional data includes an indicator indicative of a method by which the transaction amount is paid to the second party.

65. (Original) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said method includes an electronic funds transfer.

66. (Original) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said transactional data includes a PIN.

67. (Original) The apparatus of claim 66 wherein said PIN is encrypted.

68. (Original) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said transactional data includes instructional information, the first party causing the transaction amount to be paid to the second party in response to said instructional information.

69. (Original) The apparatus of claim 68 wherein said instructional information includes a request for a confirmation by the first party to the second party that the transaction amount has been paid.

70. (Original) The apparatus of claim 68 wherein said instructional information includes information on a date by which the transaction amount is paid to the second party.

71. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said postage indicium includes a digital signature for authenticating at least part of said postage indicium.

72. (Original) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said transactional data is encoded in a bar-code.

73. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said postage indicium includes a human readable portion.

74. (Original) The apparatus of claim 73 wherein said human readable portion includes information identifying said second party.

75. (Original) The apparatus of claim 73 wherein said human readable portion includes the transaction amount.

76. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said postage indicium includes a machine readable portion.

77. (Original) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said first party is a postal authority.

78. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said first party is a courier other than a postal authority.

79. (Original) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein the amount of said payment for service is zero.

80. (Original) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said postage indicium is fixed on a tangible medium.

81. (Original) The apparatus of claim 80 wherein said tangible medium includes a label.

82-129. (Cancelled)

130. (Previously presented) A method for processing a mail piece for which postage needs to be dispensed before delivery of the mail piece, comprising the steps of:

obtaining from the mail piece selected information appearing on the mail piece, wherein the selected information includes data identifying an originator of said mail piece; and

determining whether to dispense the postage in response to at least the selected information, wherein a dispensation of the postage is disallowed when said originator is determined to be unauthorized to expend the postage.

131. (Original) The method of claim 130 wherein the selected information is represented by a bar-code on said mail piece.

132-133. (Cancelled)

134. (Previously presented) The method of claim 130 wherein the originator is an individual.

135. (Previously presented) The method of claim 130 wherein the originator is an organization.

136. (Original) The method of claim 130 wherein the selected information includes information representative of an authorization code.

137. (Original) The method of claim 130 further comprising the step of receiving data representative of cost of said delivery.

138. (Original) The method of claim 137 wherein whether to dispense the postage is determined also in response to said data.

139. (Previously presented) A method for dispensing payments comprising the steps of:

creating a postage indicium, said postage indicium including, a proof of payment for service, by a first party, and transactional data comprising at least information representative of a transaction amount, said first party causing said transaction amount to be paid to a second party in response to at least said transactional data when said first party processes said postage indicium; and

generating said postage indicium.

140. (Original) The method of claim 139 wherein said transactional data includes information identifying said second party.

141. (Previously presented) The method of claim 139 wherein said transactional data includes information concerning an originator of said postage indicium.

142. (Original) The method of claim 139 wherein said transactional data includes an indicator indicative of a methodology by which the transaction amount is paid to the second party.

143. (Original) The method of claim 142 wherein said methodology includes an electronic funds transfer.

144. (Original) The method of claim 139 wherein said transactional data includes a PIN.

145. (Original) The method of claim 144 wherein said PIN is encrypted.

146. (Original) The method of claim 139 wherein said transactional data includes instructional information, the first party causing the transaction amount to be paid to the second party in response to the instructional information,

147. (Original) The method of claim 146 wherein said instructional information includes a request for a confirmation by the first party to the second party that the transaction amount has been paid.

148. (Original) The method of claim 146 wherein said instructional information includes information on a date by which the transaction amount is paid to the second party.

149. (Previously presented) The method of claim 139 wherein said postage indicium includes a digital signature for authenticating at least part of said postage indicium.

150. (Original) The method of claim 139 wherein said transactional data is encoded in a bar-code.

151. (Previously presented) The method of claim 139 wherein said postage indicium includes a human readable portion.

152. (Original) The method of claim 151 wherein said human readable portion includes information identifying said second party.

153. (Original) The method of claim 151 wherein said human readable portion includes the transaction amount.

154. (Previously presented) The method of claim 139 wherein said postage indicium includes a machine readable portion.

155. (Original) The method of claim 139 wherein said first party is a postal authority.

156. (Previously presented) The method of claim 139 wherein said first party is a courier other than a postal authority.

157. (Original) The method of claim 139 wherein the amount of said payment for service is zero.

158. (Previously presented) The method of claim 139 wherein said postage indicium is generated onto a tangible medium.

159. (Original) The method of claim 158 wherein said tangible medium includes a label.

160. (Previously presented) The method of claim 139 wherein said postage indicium is generated onto a mail piece.

161. (Previously presented) A postage processing method comprising the steps of:

processing at least one postage indicium including a proof of payment, for service by a first party, and transactional data comprising at least information representative of a transaction amount; and

causing, in response to at least said transactional data, said transaction amount to be paid to a second party when the postage indicium is processed.

162. (Previously presented) The method of claim 161 wherein said postage indicium appears on a mail piece.

163. (Original) The method of claim 162 wherein said mail piece is delivered according to an address appearing on said mail piece.

164. (Original) The method of claim 161 wherein said transactional data includes information identifying said second party.

165. (Previously presented) The method of claim 161 wherein said transactional data includes information concerning an originator of said postage indicium.

166. (Original) The method of claim 161 wherein said transactional data includes an indicator indicative of a methodology by which the transaction amount is paid to the second party.

167. (Original) The method of claim 166 wherein said methodology includes an electronic funds transfer.

168. (Original) The method of claim 161 wherein said transactional data includes a PIN.

169. (Original) The method of claim 168 wherein said PIN is encrypted.

170. (Original) The method of claim 161 wherein said transactional data includes instructional information, the first party causing the transaction amount to be paid to the second party in response to said instructional information.

171. (Original) The method of claim 170 wherein said instructional information includes a request for a confirmation by the first party to the second party that the transaction amount has been paid.

172. (Original) The method of claim 170 wherein said instructional information includes information on a date by which the transaction amount is paid to the second party.

173. (Previously presented) The method of claim 161 wherein said postage indicium includes a digital signature for authenticating at least part of said postage indicium.

174. (Original) The method of claim 161 wherein said transactional data is encoded in a bar-code.

175. (Previously presented) The method of claim 161 wherein said postage indicium includes a human readable portion.

176. (Original) The method of claim 175 wherein said human readable portion includes information identifying said second party.

177. (Original) The method of claim 175 wherein said human readable portion includes the transaction amount.

178. (Previously presented) The method of claim 161 wherein said postage indicium includes a machine readable portion.

179. (Original) The method of claim 161 wherein said first party is a postal authority.

180. (Previously presented) The method of claim 161 wherein said first party is a courier other than a postal authority.

181. (Original) The method of claim 161 wherein the amount of said payment for service is zero.

182. (Original) The method of claim 161 wherein said postage indicium is fixed on a tangible medium.

183. (Original) The method of claim 182 wherein said tangible medium includes a label.

184-191. (Cancelled)

192. (Previously presented) A method for sending a mail piece comprising:

indicating on the mail piece information concerning a content in the mail piece; and

providing on the mail piece an indicator [for affirming that the content is included in the mail piece], said indicator causing a processor of the mail piece to inform a third party of the information while the mail piece is being sent.

193. (Original) The method of claim 192 wherein the content includes a payment.

194. (Original) The method of claim 193 wherein the information includes an amount of the payment.

195. (Original) The method of claim 192 wherein the third party is an addressee of the mail-piece.

196. (Original) The method of claim 192 wherein the indicator includes a digital signature.

197. (Original) The method of claim 192 wherein the information is encrypted.

198. (Previously presented) The method of claim 192 wherein the information is incorporated in an indicium.

199. (Previously presented) The method of claim 198 wherein the indicium includes a postage amount.

200. (Previously presented) The method of claim 192 wherein the indicator affirms that the content is included in the mail piece.

201. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein the postage indicium includes a postage amount.

202. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 58 wherein the postage indicium includes a postage amount.

203. (Previously presented) The method of claim 139 wherein the postage indicium includes a postage amount.

204. (Previously presented) The method of claim 161 wherein the postage indicium includes a postage amount.

205. (Previously presented) The method of claim 198 wherein the indicium includes a postage amount.

206. (Cancelled)

207. (Cancelled)

208. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said second party is a utility company.

209. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 78 wherein said second party is a utility company.

210. (Previously presented) The method of claim 192 wherein said third party is a utility company.